

Torres Strait Finfish Working Group 2017.01

Meeting Record

16-17 March 2017

Note all meeting papers and records are
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Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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Meeting Participants

Members and declaration of interests

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM (recently developed Torres Strait Finfish Action Plan report for TSRA/FRDC), co-investigator on FRDC and TSRA Top Western Fisheries Feasibility project led by A Tobin.
Andrew Trappett	FWG Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts	QDAF Member	Nil
Mariana Nahas	TSRA Member	Nil
Michael O'Neill	Research Member	Principal Fisheries Scientist, QDAF. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
David Brewer	Research Member	Independent Consultant. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Maluwap Nona	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. Chairperson Malu Lamar.
Rocky Stephen	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. President Kos and Abob Fisheries
Frank Faud	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Tony Vass	*Industry (sunset licence holder representative)	No financial interest in Torres Strait Fisheries. Holds Queensland East Coast quota for coral trout and 'other' finfish species. Previous Torres Strait finfish operator. Representative for sunset licence holders.

Observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Jerry Stephen	*TSRA Board - Fisheries Portfolio	TIB licence holder. Traditional Owner, Ugar Island. Member, Fisheries Quota Management Committee Deputy chair TSRA

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Joseph Posu	PNG NFA	Nil
Ian Liviko	PNG NFA	Nil
John Ramsay	TSRA Program Manager, Fisheries	Nil
Andrew Tobin	Researcher	Independent consultant. Investigator on TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. PI on FRDC barramundi, crab fishery project. Owns a retail seafood outlet that buys product from the Torres Strait.
John Matthew	TSRA	Nil

* Permanent observer

Apologies

Name	Position
Eliziah Wasaga	Industry Member
Tenny Elisala	Industry Member

Action items

Number	Action
1.	AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure
2.	The FWG to meet again in October 2017 to consider the TACs for the 2018 – 2019 season.
3.	AFMA to investigate the feasibility of the Torres Strait coral trout stock being assessed as part of the 2018 east coast coral trout assessment scheduled to be undertaken by the Queensland Government.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
1.	<p>The FWG recommended a Spanish mackerel TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 fishing season based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a target biomass reference point of B_{60} applying a step-down TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 season only (to minimise the operation impact of the proposed TAC reduction from 187t), supported subject to further advice from the Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock if catches exceed the Recommended Biological Catch in the 2017/18 season

Number	Recommendation
	without a step-down the recommended TAC would be 113t (RBC 125t - 12t for estimated subsistence catch taken outside the commercial fishery)
2.	Consistent with the FWG recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 the coral trout TAC (134.4t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 fishing season.

Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

1.1. Opening Prayer / Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners / Welcome / Apologies

Mr Frank Faid opened the meeting in prayer.

Meeting chairperson, Andy Bodsworth, welcomed members and observers and noted that the fishery was in an important stage of development and the advice collected through this working group would provide valuable input to the upcoming PZJA decision making process.

Apologies were received from members Tenny Elisala and Elizah Wasaga. Meeting observer, Patrick Mills attended up to agenda item 2.7 and returned to present item 5.7. Andrew Tobin was noted as an apology for the second day of the meeting.

1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The Finfish Working Group (FWG) adopted the agenda with one change to remove agenda item 5.1. It was noted that the harvest strategy project had not yet commenced due to contracting delays. The FWG therefore agreed for an update on the harvest strategy project to be provided out of session.

1.3. Declaration of Interests

The FWG generally noted that there could be potential conflicts of interest for members and observers when providing information and advice on some agenda items.

All members provided an update on their declaration of interests. Observers also advised on their interests which are recorded under the section titled: *Meeting Participants*.

1.4. Actions Arising

The FWG noted the status of the previous action items including an update on the nature of changes to AFMA logbooks as detailed in the tabled paper.

Agenda Item 2 – Fishery Updates

2.1. AFMA management

The FWG noted the AFMA management update as detailed in the tabled agenda paper and discussed the following:

Western line closure

The FWG noted progress since the last FWG meeting to remove the western line closure (as detailed in the agenda paper, work is ongoing to compile outcomes of previous consultation

processes). The FWG noted again that the western closure reflects a historical jurisdictional boundary rather than a specific management purpose.

An industry member advised that if the area of the western closure was to be reopened consideration should first be given to:

- how much fishing the area could support noting that the fishing grounds are different from those in the east and concern that the area may not be able to support the number of licences in the fishery; and
- the potential for alternative livelihoods or business opportunities for traditional owners such as ecotourism.

Other industry members were generally supportive of this proposal and advised that further community consultation should occur before the western area of the fishery was reopened, to gauge community aspirations on future usage.

Noting there are no existing agreements in place to guide resource sharing between sectors (fishing, tourism etc) the FWG agreed for following **action**:

- AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure.

Foreign compliance update

The FWG noted the update from the AFMA Foreign Compliance Operations officer as detailed in the agenda paper. Members and observers provided the following updates and comments:

- communities are concerned that PNG Daru markets are reportedly selling turtle and dugong caught in the Torres Strait;
- future compliance risks assessment should include a level of consultation with stakeholders to ensure community concerns and knowledge are taken into account; and
- industry was very concerned that a tanker went off-course in the Torres Strait the previous week and that AFMA should respond to such risks. AFMA acknowledged that it was indeed a serious matter and that AMSA were the appropriate body to respond.

2.2. TSRA update

The FWG noted an update from the TSRA as detailed the paper distributed at the meeting (**Attachment A**).

2.3. Native Title

Speaking on behalf of Malu Lamar, Mr Maluwap Nona advised that Malu Lamar would be establishing a company for the purposes of holding any future allocations of fishing access rights and quota. It was also advised that Malu Lamar and the TSIRC would be signing an official partnership agreement and similar partnerships are being discussed with Kauareg and Northern Peninsula Area traditional owners.

2.4. PNG – National Fisheries Authority Update

The FWG noted the following updates from PNG-NFA officers:

- Very little interest exists in PNG in fishing for finfish species at present with the exception of barramundi. It was advised that barramundi catches have reportedly been declining in recent years (e.g. year 2000 catches were over 100 tonnes, 2015 catches were around five tonnes).

- More fishers were using lures nowadays which are considered less selective (capturing all size classes) than mesh gillnets which have historically been used which are selective for certain size classes. PNG-NFA are giving some consideration to regulating against the use of lures in the barramundi fishery.
- Funding is set aside for research and stock assessment work for barramundi but a work plan is yet to be finalised. Assistance from AFMA and CSIRO to support a stock assessment may be sought.
- Indonesian buyers were having a heavy influence in PNG marketplaces placing a strong demand for seafood species with commercial value which are purchased and exported across the border.
- PNG-NFA advised that as the majority of their catch data comes from commercial export companies, they are reviewing catch-reporting in the western province; with a focus on artisanal fishery and local market fisher's data.
- Reports have been received that the invasive species snakehead and climbing perch are present in the area of the western province. It was reported that snakehead fish have commercial value and are sold in marketplaces.

Some industry members queried whether any consideration had been given to trading and developmental opportunities between Torres Strait and PNG treaty villages. PNG-NFA advised that there could be some future opportunities for co-operation. The AFMA member advised that the PNG-Australian Bilateral Treaty meetings would be the best forum to progress these issues and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is the responsible agency.

2.5. QDAF update

The FWG noted the following general updates from the QDAF member:

- Consultation on the Queensland Government's Green paper to guide fisheries reform has been completed and the outcomes are under consideration.
- QDAF is updating their Spanish mackerel stock assessment which is expected to be published September/October and will be used to inform future Total Allowable Catch setting.
- There is no east coast harvest strategy for Spanish mackerel. The Queensland government has committed to using the updated assessment to guide the development of a harvest strategy.
- A decision was pending on setting coral trout quota following a recent meeting with industry. It was expected that industry would be advised of the outcomes mid-April.
- White spot disease had recently been detected in prawns in Moreton Bay, outside of the area of the original Logan River outbreak. It was noted that trawlers operating in the Moreton Bay do not also operate in the Torres Strait.

Charter and recreational catch data

As requested from the July 2016 FWG meeting, the QDAF member provided an overview of available data for the Queensland state charter boat and recreational fish catches from the area of the Torres Strait.

Charter fishing catch data

- Under the QDAF information disclosure policy, data stemming from less than five boats could not be released. It was advised that charter boats keep a daily logbook of: area fished (main reef fished), number of fishers, crew, species and numbers caught, species and numbers released and kilograms retained for the trip.
- For the time period 1995-2014 (a 19 year timespan) a total of 360 days had been fished by 10 licensed charter operators in the Torres Strait. 19.58 tonnes of reef-fish had been retained with the majority being reef fish such as coral trout with minor catches of Spanish mackerel. The eastern islands of the Torres Strait were the main areas fished. Bag and size limits apply to charter boat operators.

- The 10 nm island closures (as per sunset licence conditions) do not apply for charter boat operators. Recreational and charter boat fishing is regulated under the laws of Queensland which is separate to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.

Recreational fishing catch data

- Only limited data with large amounts of error is available on recreational catch by fishers in the Torres Strait. Only 3 households provided data during the 2014/15 Queensland recreational survey.

The FWG noted the following comments from members:

- Communities are concerned that they have no say in the regulation of charter fishing operations in the Torres Strait. The industry permanent observer advised that it was unlikely charter vessels would have fished the waters around Bramble Cay due to its remoteness.
- Malu Lamar would like to be involved in any future recreational fishing survey in the Torres Strait.

The FWG agreed to the following:

- overall the data indicates that charter catches have likely been low to date;
- the Queensland recreational survey data as currently analysed is not adequate to produce a meaningful catch estimate.
- while recreational catches are also likely to be relatively low, a future priority should be to explore options to develop a reliable recreational catch estimate (for example supplement the survey coverage in the region, consider options to extrapolate from other data, fishing diaries).
- understanding the scale and therefore the likely impacts of recreational and charter fishing on commercial stocks is important for the management of the fishery.

2.6. Domestic compliance update

The FWG noted the update on domestic compliance provided by the QDAF member as detailed in the agenda paper and advice from members:

- industry and community concern remains over the limited number of days spent on the water in the Torres Strait by Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. It was suggested that a QBFP office should be re-established in the Torres Strait and that the traditional owners should be engaged as fisheries officers as per the functional model of the Torres Strait Ranger program.
- AFMA advised that initiatives were being progressed to improve compliance beyond on-the-water patrols such as the implementation of vessel monitoring systems, mandatory fish receiver reporting and the development of a public register of fishing licences held.
- Malu Lamar advised that consideration should be given to listing barramundi cod as a protected species in the Torres Strait (given that commercial and traditional fishers could take this species here) due to its potential future value for ecotourism.

2.7. Strategic overview and update (including economic and market trends)

The FWG noted the following update by industry members and observers on recent fishery performance, trends, activities and issues occurring in the Torres Strait finfish and relevant fisheries issues:

- industry is eager for more Traditional Owners to enter the Finfish Fishery.

- Meriam fishers have been successfully increasing their effort with recent finfish catches around 500kg per day being taken by five to six dories. This catch is being frozen for the local market and also being sent to Cairns via barge.
- more representation from active fishers is needed on the working groups to ensure on-water fishing practices and business development issues were understood. It was also noted that this would broaden the on-water knowledge base of how data is used for fishery management purposes and could facilitate uptake of logbooks. An active fisher from Mer (e.g. Alan Passi), should be invited to the next FWG meeting as an observer for this purpose.
- a new finfish business is being established at Poruma.
- local restaurants are seeking locally caught Spanish mackerel but are finding supply difficult.
- the Ugar industry association is working to develop a five year business plan following on from its success with its bech de mer. The plan will assist the association to become commercially independent. The association is advocating for a similar joint business plan to be developed among the eastern communities. This association is seeking to have this done prior to making investments in things such as freezers to ensure smart/viable investments are made.

The FWG noted the following update from the QDAF member:

- QDAF reported that coral trout caught southwards of Bowen attract a price premium of \$5 to \$10 per kilogram due to market preference for fish with a strong red colouration.
- QDAF member advised that some east coast operators were currently tied up due to not being able to acquire coral trout quota.

The FWG noted an update on the FRDC funded project on scoping the development of Barramundi, jewfish and crab fisheries in the top-western waters of the Torres Strait by Andrew Tobin, the Principle Investigator for the project.

Mr Tobin advised that the project has four elements:

1. A desktop scoping study. Collate past research findings etc.
2. Field surveys to understand local stock abundance and whether it could support a local fishery. Aim to commence field work after Easter.
3. A stop-go review to determine if there is enough industry interest and stock available to justify proceeding with the study.
4. An evaluation of infrastructure, skills and business needs to support an active fishery.

The FWG noted the PZJA will likely require advice from the FWG to evaluate any proposal to develop and/or expand new fisheries to ensure they are sustainable. The FWG encourage early engagement with the FWG to ensure any future proposals may be considered in a timely manner.

Dr Tobin also noted that a PZJA scientific permit will be required to undertake the field activities.

Speaking on behalf of Malu Lamar, the representative requested that the PBCs in the relevant communities be engaged as soon as possible and that the terms and conditions of the work for this project be clearly agreed.

Agenda Item 3 – Recommending Total Allowable Catches for the 2017/18 fishing season

3.1. Spanish mackerel

The FWG noted advice from the Finfish Technical Scientific Working Group (STWG) arising from its November 2016 meeting and catch estimates from outside the fishery (traditional and recreational take).

Subject to further advice from the Finfish Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock should the Recommended Biological Catch be exceeded in the upcoming season the FWG **recommended** a Spanish mackerel TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 fishing season based on:

- A target biomass reference point of B_{60} . The FWG supported a higher biomass target above B_{MSY} and the Commonwealth default B_{MEY} target of B_{48} , to ensure a healthy population biomass and catch rates in order to achieve and balance sustainability, economic, social and cultural objectives. The FWG noted that a harvest strategy is being developed for the fishery which will establish long term reference points for the stock.
- Advice from the TSWG for a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t (referred to at the current meeting as the ‘total kill’ recommended for the stock by all fishers both commercial and non-commercial). The FWG noted that the TSWG accepted the updated stock assessment as the best available stock assessment for Spanish mackerel whilst also noting sources of uncertainty in the assessment. The FWG further noted advice from the TSWG that a level of uncertainty is expected in fishery stock assessments and that the current assessment should serve to guide future research and data priorities for the fishery.
- Best estimates of other sources of fishing mortality (subsistence (-12 t), recreational (no estimates available), charter (negligible catches recorded), PNG catch sharing (0 t) as detailed in **Table 1** (below).
- Applying TAC step-down for the 2017/18 fishing season only. Noting the scale of the proposed TAC change (down from 187t) a phased reduction in the TAC (or step-down) for the 2017/18 season was supported subject to further advice from the Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock if catches exceed the Recommended Biological Catch in the 2017/18 season. The FWG also noted that the current TAC has not been caught in recent years and therefore the operational impact of a TAC reduction should be relatively small. The FWG noted that without the suggested step-down approach the recommended TAC would be 113t (RBC 125t - 12t taken outside the fishery).

Discounting other sources of fishing mortality

The FWG noted the requirements of the Australian Government policy (detailed in the *Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines 2007*), that all sources of mortality (catch) should be taken into account when setting a TAC. This generally means the TAC equates to the RBC for the species minus expected catches to be taken outside of the fishery.

The FWG discussed both the accuracy of available catch estimates and whether it was still necessary to discount other catches when pursuing a higher target biomass (i.e. having a target reference point of B_{60} rather than B_{MSY} or the Commonwealth default B_{MEY} target of B_{48}).

TSRA representatives noted that other fisheries, such as TRL followed a different approach and did not necessarily deduct other sources of mortality in setting a TAC. The TSRA member queried whether that, if the RBC is derived from commercial fishery data only, other sources of mortality

are 'accounted for' by not being included in the model used to estimate the spawning biomass. The Scientific Member confirmed that the RBC (125t) does not include a discount for non-commercial catches (for example subsistence catches).

TSRA representatives suggested that the 12 t subsistence catch estimate (from Bussilacchi research papers) was likely to be an overestimate. This estimate was referred to the TSWG for clarification out of session.

The FWG noted that:

- consistent with contemporary fisheries management, the precautionary principle and Australian Government harvest strategy policy, estimates of other Spanish mackerel catches should be discounted from the RBC when developing a TAC recommendation. Catch estimates may change overtime as new data becomes available. ; and
- the purpose of the higher biomass target B_{60} is to ensure a healthy population biomass and catch rates in order to achieve and balance sustainability, economic, social and cultural objectives. A higher biomass means that more fish will be available for purposes other than commercial fishing. For example more fish will be left to support traditional fishing.

Table 1. Agreed Spanish mackerel catch estimates outside of the fishery for the 2017/18

Source of catches	Expected catch (t)	Comments
Subsistence catch (kai kai) by traditional inhabitants	12	Based on data from <i>Busilacchi 2013</i> . Note this includes total of catch estimates for Mer, Masig and Erub Islands. The FWG agreed in July 2016 that the catch figures from the <i>Busilacchi 2008</i> research are the best estimates of traditional take of finfish. While some members considered this figure to be an overestimate, the FWG had no further empirical information available to recommend a different estimate.
Recreational	No estimates available	The FWG agreed that the QLD recreational data for the Torres Strait region is too limited to derive a catch estimate. Total catches are expected to be low. The FWG agreed for it to be a priority in future years to explore possible cost-effective options to develop a reliable estimate for recreational catches.
Charter	Negligible catches recorded	Available QLD logbook records show Charter boat line catches are low. Logbook records for the period between 1995 and 2014 report a total of 19.58 tonnes of mixed species taken from Torres Strait waters. The FWG agreed that catches are likely to be negligible.
PNG catch sharing	0	PNG_NFA have declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements for 2017/18.
Total discounts	- 12	
RBC (125t) – total for other catches (12t)	113t	
TAC with step-down applied	125t	

Concerns over exceeding the RBC

The FWG noted advice that the TSRA Board had approved for 110 t of Spanish mackerel to be leased to sunset license holders in the upcoming season and that the Finfish Quota Management Committee considered a TIB take of 15 t (10 t being the highest recorded catch following the 2008 buyout plus a 5 t buffer noting that under reporting of catch is known to be occurring).

The FWG noted the recommendation from the STWG that if harvests increase above 150 t and/or fishing effort increases above 1000 operation days, then catch rates may erode in the long term.

Concerns were raised by some industry members that the reduction in TAC coupled with the high proportion of catch proposed to be leased to the sunset sector would limit potential economic growth for the TIB sector particularly if more freezers would likely come back into operation. The FWG noted that leasing arrangements were separate to providing advice on recommended TACs, and that discussion on implementing the TAC was scheduled for Agenda Item 5.4.

Other

- While noting that this is outside the scope of the FWG, the Malu Lamar representative recommended that the FQMC membership be expanded to include representatives from both Malu Lamar and the fishing industry.
- TSRA representatives strongly expressed their disappointment that the FWG had not met to consider the TAC prior to the end of 2016. The TSRA has previously advised the PZJA that it is a business requirement for the TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee to meet in February each year in order to make leasing recommendations to the March Board Meeting. The TSRA stated again the requirement for the FWG to meet no later than October 2017. The TSRA representative made it clear that it was a non-negotiable business requirement of the TSRA Board to consider the leasing recommendations of the Finfish Quota Management Committee in March each year.

3.2 Coral trout

The FWG reaffirmed its recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 that the coral trout TAC (134.9 t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 season.

The FWG noted that there was no new information to guide a different recommendation at this time. It was further noted that the harvest strategy to be developed will guide future assessments and TAC recommendations.

The FWG noted that based on catches being significantly below the TAC (reported catches remaining around 20-40t) it was not deemed necessary to reconsider the TAC to discount estimates of other fishing mortality (e.g. subsistence take) at this time. The FWG however agreed that this should be undertaken when new information becomes available to review status of the stock and subsequent TACs.

The FWG noted the following advice from members:

- a Queensland east coast coral trout assessment is planned for 2018 and there is potential for the Torres Strait stock to be included in the assessment;
- feedback from boats fishing for live coral trout in the 2016/17 season to date had been favourable with good catch rates and survival rates;
- the status of live boats returning to the Torres Strait in upcoming seasons would be dependent on maintaining high catch rates and market dynamics across both the TS and east coast. A price premium is paid for red coloured fish which are found in southern Queensland

Recommendation: Consistent with the FWG recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 the coral trout TAC (134.4t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 fishing season.

Action: AFMA to investigate the feasibility of the Torres Strait coral trout stock being assessed as part of the scheduled 2018 east coast coral trout assessment scheduled to be undertaken by the Queensland Government.

3.3 Other reef line species

The FWG noted previous advice from its 12-13 July 2016 meeting that subject to further consideration by the Technical Scientific Working Group (TSWG) of coral trout to by-product catch ratios when targeting coral trout and total take of 'other species' by other sectors –

there should be no further increase above 30 tonnes until systems are in place to independently verify catches, a species-specific risk assessment has been undertaken and where applicable catch triggers and control rules have been agreed.

The FWG noted advice that the Technical Scientific Working Group was unable to discuss the development of a work plan to assess risk and manage expansion on other reef line species at its meeting on 10 November 2016 due to time limitations.

The FWG reaffirmed its advice that future expansion in effort for 'other' species requires effective risk assessment and management measures. The FWG agreed that taking into account the risks identified by the FWG at its last meeting there is also a need to review the 30t limit in light of the species composition of catches taken this season.

The FWG noted advice that targeted fishing for other species by sunset sector boats had not yet occurred in the 2016/17 season. Instead operators had focused on fishing for live coral trout. TSRA advised that there is less interest from sunset licence applicants to target other species in 2017/18 fishing season.

The FWG noted that the scope of the harvest strategy project does not include other reef-line species though there may be capacity to commission work in parallel to this project should the need arise. In the immediate-term the FWG supported in-principle for any further work to assess the potential to expand effort on other species be undertaken subject to having:

- a. a detailed fishing proposal describing the nature of any proposed expansion;
- b. scientific advice on the conditions for any expansion in terms of species, location, catch levels, data collection requirements and any other matters required to mitigate risks to the stocks;
- c. where appropriate, management measures and policies be considered by the FWG; and
- d. funding available to support the required scientific advice.

Agenda Item 4 – Research

4.1. Traditional take catch estimates: past estimates (Dr Busilacchi) and future research (CSIRO)

The FWG noted the update on the research project titled "*The subsistence coral reef fish fishery in the Torres Strait: monitoring protocols and assessment*" as detailed in the agenda paper and the milestone report.

The FWG noted that the:

- initial pilot phase survey work on Erub Island is now complete. Reports indicate that the project was well received by the Erub community with good attendance and support given at a community meeting introducing the project and CSIRO scientists;
- survey was unable to engage a long-term community monitor with the pre-arranged candidate falling through due to other commitments. Instead a revised single 'snapshot' survey was taken by the CSIRO staff while on the island. Despite community support, the survey was limited by time and participation levels. Some people were not entirely comfortable with providing their individual catch data;
- Erub fishers association Chairperson remained very positive about the work conducted at Erub noting that it was likely the first step of a longer process required to get monitoring arrangements established;
- project team had met with Malu Lamar, AFMA and TSRA in 2016 before the project began to get general project guidance advice including community engagement;
- project had been recommended by the FQMC and subsequently funded by the TSRA (administered by AFMA);
- project is planning to roll out training of monitors on Poruma and Masig islands with community permission being given. The Mer community is also supportive.

In light of findings from the Erub pilot phase the FWG recognised there is a risk that without change the project may not be able:

- to obtain sufficient data to produce a reliable estimate of traditional take; or
- to establish an on-going community-based data collection program.

The FWG generally agreed however the project will likely provide a baseline for further investment in data-collection and establishing ongoing data collection programmes. It was also noted that realistically achieving these aims could be expected to take some time.

The FWG noted the following advice from members:

- close engagement with the PBCs is central to the success of these kind of projects. Ideally the PBC would be given responsibility to manage the data collection programmes in the same way that they have responsibility for the Turtle and Dugong Management Plans;
- further community awareness is required to encourage reporting and that small incentives (financial or material) could improve the participation rates;
- paid positions need to be created at the community level (not within government agencies) to progress and resolve fisheries issues and improve community awareness and communication. This would also provide employment. The TSRA member advised that TSRA were investigating the potential to establish fishery extension officers that could assist communities with these projects.
- Malu Lamar and the TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member further emphasised that all research projects occurring in the Torres Strait should engage with them before the projects begin to ensure that communities are aware of the purpose of the research and any terms and conditions are agreed and understood.

The FWG **agreed** that AFMA should convene another meeting of the traditional-take project team to consider possible options for addressing ongoing project risks in light of lessons learnt from work completed at Erub.

4.2. Update – Smart phone technology for remote data collection

The FWG noted the project update was available for members in the agenda paper and did not discuss it further.

4.3. Update – defining the status of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing

The FWG noted the project update was available for members in the agenda paper and did not discuss it further.

4.4. Research priorities

The FWG noted that consideration of research priorities is an important standing item for the FWG to ensure research investment and management resources are effectively targeted. The FWG noted the research priorities identified at its last meeting and agreed to revisit the list alongside the development of the harvest strategy. The harvest strategy is expected to assist in identifying future data and research needs.

Agenda Item 5 – Management

5.1. Finfish harvest strategy project update

The FWG noted that an out-of-session update would be provided on this project once the funding contract had been completed.

5.2. Options for ongoing scientific advice

The FWG noted the tabled paper which outlined options for gaining future scientific advice and recommended that a formal Resource Assessment Group (RAG) be established:

- using the standard Terms of Reference for the PZJA RAGs as set out in the PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (PZJA FMP No. 1);
- comprise the membership: a Chairperson; Government (AFMA, QDAF, TSRA); three industry members (note TSWG has two industry members); and three scientific (members)

The FWG noted that AFMA would make an open call for applicants for the scientific and industry members and applicants would be assessed by a PZJA agency selection panel.

The FWG also noted the following advice from members:

- Malu Lamar representative advised that they do not wish to attend a RAG directly but strongly recommend that traditional owners be present who are active fishers. It was suggested that a Finfish RAG would benefit from having advice from fishers from Ugar, Erub and Mer Islands. Rocky Stephen, Dan Sailor and Alan Passi were recommended; and to minimise costs and time, RAG meetings could potentially be held alongside working group meetings.

5.3. Formalising finfish total allowable catches

The FWG noted advice that although a plan of management is in place for the Finfish Fishery, under the finfish management plan TACs may only be determined by the PZJA following the allocation of quota units (or units of fishing capacity). The plan of management allows for the allocation of quota units however this has not yet been undertaken. Until such time that an allocation occurs, TACs may be implemented by way of licence condition. The FWG noted that catch limits are currently only applied to sunset licences. TIB catches are not limited.

The FWG agreed that limiting catches to an agreed total allowable catch (TAC) is important for ensuring the sustainability of the fishery and achieving agreed management targets. The FWG further noted that with a reduced Spanish mackerel TAC for the 2017/18 fishing season, and depending on future growth in TIB sector catches, Spanish mackerel catches may approach (or possibly exceed) the RBC (or total recommended kill).

The TSRA advised that for as long as there is a leasing process (i.e. TIB sector not fishing the whole TAC) it is unlikely that a TAC would be exceeded as catches could be reduced by reducing the amount of tonnage being made available to sunset operators.

The FWG considered regulatory and non-regulatory (by other agreements/arrangements) management options for limiting catches to the TAC and noted the following comments and advice from some members:

- a TAC could be difficult to enforce in the absence of improved catch reporting (for example will management be able to detect when the TAC is exceeded);
- a level of overcatch may be sustainable when there is a higher target biomass reference point (i.e. having a target reference point of B_{60} rather than B_{MSY} or the Commonwealth default B_{MEY} target of B_{48}) and given catch reductions since the buyout;
- sufficient catch should be reserved for the TIB sector to allow sustainable expansion without risking an overcatch and impacting the stock. In the absence of reliable TIB catch data the TSRA advised that they rely on the expertise of the members of the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) to provide a best estimate of the TIB commercial catch. For 2017/18 season this was estimated by the FQMC at 15 tonnes;
- measures should be introduced as a matter of priority to limit the risk of overcatching in any year; and
- Research members advised that regular over-catching of the RBC would likely have negative impacts on the stock. These impacts can take a long time to remedy. It was also noted that if the stock was assessed as subject to overfishing by ABARES further downstream effects may occur such as future market access, branding of products etc.
- TSRA advised, in their opinion, that the finfish leasing process is already an effective non-regulatory measure to constrain catches to below the TAC, as the amount made available for leasing out each year is dependent on the TIB sector's catch and aspirations of the coming season.

Two options were identified:

Option 1 – status quo for the 2017/18 fishing season; catch limits only on sunset licences with proposed leasing (110t) then for the 2018/19 fishing season; implement the TAC across all licence holders and if necessary adjust leasing to further minimise the risk of overcatching. Under this option there is a risk that recommended TAC will be overcaught in 2017/18 (having regard for catch estimates and proposed sunset licence leasing). This option was supported by TIB representatives and the TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member.

Option 2 – minimise the risk of overcatching for the 2017/18 fishing season by lowering the proposed lease amount.

It was noted that option two was a more precautionary approach while option one provided phased introduction of management change. The FWG agreed to seek advice from Scientific Technical Working Group on likely impacts on the stock from exceeding the Spanish mackerel RBC in 2017/18. .

5.4. Estimates of traditional inhabitant boat sector catches

The FWG noted catch estimates of TIB commercial sector reported from reports and journals ranging from 9t to 22 t for Spanish mackerel as detailed in the agenda paper. The FWG also noted the FQMC agreed a reasonable estimate for TIB catches for the upcoming season to be 15t or less (based on maximum reported catch of 10t since the 2008 buyout and adding 5t).

The FWG discussed the accuracy and relevance of these estimates for predicting future TIB catches. One of the TIB representatives noted that 10 tonnes was the likely current catch level, although future improvements to infrastructure would likely increase annual catches to above 15 tonnes beyond the 2017/18 season. It was noted that changes have occurred in the fishery overtime (e.g. participation levels, buyout, 10 nm closures) which may influence total TIB catch. It was further noted however that in the absence of accurate catch estimates a precautionary approach should be taken.

The FWG noted that underestimating the total take either by adopting less precautionary estimates and/or under reporting, increases the risk that the RBC (or recommended total kill) will be exceeded. This can negatively impact the status of the stock and should be avoided.

The FWG encouraged all fishers to fill out logbooks to provide accurate information and reiterated its support for improving data collection systems, in particular implementing a mandatory fish receiver system.

5.5. Development of a public register

The FWG supported the development of a public licensing register noting it is proposed to cover all fishers, all fisheries, scientific permits and PNG cross endorsed vessels and make the following details of each licensee available:

- a. Company or individual's name
- b. Licence type (Fishing licence (TIB, TVH), Sunset, Carrier A, B or C)
- c. Licence Number
- d. Vessel identifying number (the boat mark), or "No Boat" status
- e. Licence expiry date
- f. Fishery endorsements (TRL, CT, SM, Prawn, BDM, Treaty endorsement)
- g. Catch or Effort allocation where applicable (Prawn effort, sunset catch allocation)

The FWG noted that the register would **not** include contact details for licensees and is proposed to be made available on the PZJA website and updated at least monthly.

5.6. Future management priorities

The FWG noted that consideration of management priorities is an important standing item for the FWG to ensure management resources are effectively targeted. The FWG noted the management priorities identified at its last meeting and recommended no change. The FWG however noted that climate change impacts and management responses should be considered for FWG work plan in the medium-term.

5.7. Crewing of traditional inhabitant boats

The FWG noted the proposal by Torres Strait Fishers Association (TSFA) to allow for more non-indigenous fishers to be employed as crew on Traditional Inhabitant Boat licenced vessels. Mr Mills advised that TRL primary/tender vessel operators cannot get crew run their tenders and some are tied-up altogether. Mr Mills further advised that the current crewing restrictions make it difficult for operators to be viable (for example to pay back loans) and discourage investment. TSFA were seeking the flexibility to have three non-traditional inhabitant crews on the primary/tender operations and were focused on getting skilled foreign divers from the PNG treaty villages (utilising the 457 visa scheme as other fisheries do). The FWG noted advice from the AFMA member that approvals under the relevant immigration laws would be required to use foreign divers and that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade might be able to provide some useful guidance.

Noting that the general level of support from the industry members and in-principle support for removing impediments to traditional inhabitant participation in the fisheries, the FWG recommended consultation with the broader industry and communities be undertaken to develop possible management options for further consideration.

5.8. Draft 2017/18 AFMA Finfish Fishery budget

The FWG noted the draft AFMA 2017/18 Finfish Fishery budget which is based on convening two FWG meetings.

5.9. Grant of carrier licenses to non-traditional inhabitants

The FWG noted advice that there is interest from small non-traditional inhabitant businesses to freight seafood in the Torres Strait and that these vessels require a carrier licence. The FWG noted advice that the PZJA licencing policy, as described in the 2004 licencing guide, is ambiguous for these types of applications. AFMA sought FWG advice on any concerns with the grant of new carrier licences to non-traditional inhabitant persons/businesses subject to specific conditions.

In line with advice from industry members the FWG **recommended** that further industry and community consultation take place to gauge stakeholder opinions on the grant of new carrier licences to non-traditional inhabitant persons/businesses.

Agenda Item 6 – Other Business

The FWG Chairperson thanked participants for their input into the meeting. AFMA advised the next meeting would likely be held in October or November 2017 and participants would be advised on the meeting date out-of-session.

Mr Frank Faud closed the meeting in prayer at 12:45 PM.



Torres Strait Regional Authority Update

Finfish Leasing

- The Finfish Quota Management Committee met on 16-17 February
- The TSRA Board considered the recommendations of the Committee on 1-2 March

Fisheries Programme projects

- Five projects are currently in progress that stem from the Finfish Action Plan:
 - Feasibility study for barramundi, jewfish and mud crab commercial fisheries in Gudumalulgal communities
 - Feasibility study for development of a bait fishery
 - Marketing, branding and export requirements for Torres Strait seafood
 - Infrastructure and services audit, and
 - Fishing skills audit
- The TSRA has published a Torres Strait Fisheries Guidebook, which sets out the management arrangements for fisheries in a small waterproof booklet.
- The Fisheries Programme will be supporting TIB fishers with the installation of VMS systems on primary vessels
- An Indigenous Cadetship Programme will commence in 2017
 - The cadetship will provide mentoring to tertiary students by the Fisheries Programme
 - The longer-term goal is develop Torres Strait Islanders to be employed in the TSRA Fisheries Programme
- The Fisheries Programme is seeking support from AFMA to train Torres Strait Islanders to be trained and employed in the AFMA observer programme
- The TSRA has completed a review of the New Zealand Maori model of community ownership of fisheries access rights
 - Further work on the development of a Torres Strait community management framework will continue through 2017 based on these results and the TSRA Board's direction
 - This work is a key component of the Road map to 100 per cent ownership of Torres Strait fisheries by Traditional Inhabitants
- The TSRA Economic Development Programme is currently seeking applications for the REIS Fisheries Growth Package
 - This package is available to both existing and new businesses seeking to build commercial fishing businesses in the Torres Strait.